



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Proposal to Delist the Bald Eagle:

## *A Summary*

A quarter to half a million bald eagles are thought to have soared the skies of North America before the arrival of the first Europeans. But as the new nation expanded, the vast domain of the eagle was diminished. Shooting for feathers and trophies, loss of prey, loss of habitat, poisoning and use of the pesticide DDT took their toll. By the early 1960's, only 417 nesting pairs were found in the lower 48 states.

Fortunately, with protection under the Endangered Species Act and the ban on DDT, the bald eagle population has nearly doubled every 7 to 8 years over the past 30 years. There are now more than 5,748 pairs of bald eagles nesting in the lower 48 states. The magnitude and success of their recovery has prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to propose taking the bald eagle off the endangered species list.

### **The Recovery Effort**

Due to the wide distribution of the bald eagle, the Service established five recovery regions to outline recovery planning goals and needs on a regional basis leading to the development of five separate recovery plans for the species. The five plans, originally developed in the 1980's, described a variety of numerical target levels for breeding pairs and productivity for different regions to measure recovery success and to set criteria for reclassification and/or delisting. In 1994, after the implementation of the five recovery plans and steady increases in the population, the status of the bald eagle was reviewed. The analysis included an assessment of known movement and migratory patterns among and between recovery regions and concluded that a range-wide status of "threatened" for a single population of bald eagles throughout the lower 48 states was appropriate. The bald eagle was then

formally reclassified as a threatened species on that basis in 1995.

Since that time bald eagle numbers have continued to steadily increase.

### **The Proposed Action**

The proposal to delist the bald eagle is the first step in a year long process that may result in the removal of the species from the list of threatened and endangered species. If the Service determines at the end of this review process that the bald eagle has recovered, a final rule will be published removing the species from the list. Once this action has occurred, the Endangered Species Act will no longer apply to the bald eagle. Bald eagles and their nests would still be protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

This proposal is based on an internal status review of bald eagle recovery achievements conducted in 1998 and 1999, including an assessment of long-term nesting and productivity data, coordination with states and tribes, the definition of a "threatened" species under the Act and an analysis of the five listing factors. These key factors are evaluated when the Service considers a listing or delisting proposal. The five factors reviewed to determine the status of a species: loss of habitat, overuse of the species through commercial or recreational activities, disease and predation, inadequacy of existing regulations, and other natural or man-made factors affecting its continued existence. Determining the status of the overall bald eagle population in the lower 48 states takes into consideration all of the regional recovery plan goals and established criteria and the degree of remaining threats on a range-wide level.

Bald eagle recovery goals have been met or exceeded for the species on a range-wide basis. Bald eagle numbers have substantially increased all across the lower 48 states. We believe the surpassing of recovery targets over broad areas and on a regional basis, and the continued increase in eagle numbers since reclassification compensates for any local shortfall in meeting targets in a few areas.

This proposal is based on a review of data which support the following observations:

- today, the distribution and numbers of bald eagles in the lower 48 states indicates a strong and healthy population that is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered;
- sufficient knowledge exists to better manage the bald eagle and its habitats in the future;
- levels of persistent pesticides known to inhibit eagle reproduction have declined substantially over time.
- improved reproductive success has resulted in a growing bald eagle population.

### **Monitoring If Delisted**

The Endangered Species Act requires the Service to monitor the status of delisted species for at least five years following delisting. If a delisted species is found to be at risk, the Service can review the best available information and if necessary invoke the emergency listing clause of the Endangered Species Act and relist the species.

Since 1973 when the bald eagle was first listed as an endangered species, the number of nests and productivity

(i.e., the number of young per nest that hatch and survive until they can fly) have been monitored throughout the lower 48 states. If the bald eagle is delisted, more than 80 percent of states in the lower 48 intend to continue their current monitoring efforts for at least five years. We believe this will provide an effective means of detecting any downward trends in the bald eagle population.

#### **Public Comment and Information**

The Service is actively seeking information from the public on its proposal to delist the bald eagle. Specifically, the Service is interested in information on any threat to bald eagles, additional information on the range, distribution or population size and current or planned activities in bald eagle range that may impact the species. Comments from interested parties will be considered by the Service if received within 90 days of the proposal's publication in the Federal Register. Comments can be sent to: Jody Gustitus Millar, Bald Eagle Recovery Coordinator, US Fish and Wildlife Service, 4469-48th Avenue Court, Rock Island, IL 61201 or comments may be sent through our website at [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

#### **Conclusion**

Bald Eagles are now thriving in this country due to the ban on DDT, habitat protection and management afforded by the Endangered Species Act, and other Federal laws that protect bald eagles from human-caused death. The immediate future of the bald eagle population nationwide appears to be secure and it is not likely to become endangered or extinct in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove Endangered Species Act protection for the bald eagle in the lower 48 states.

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
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